

Message

From: De Silva, Amila (EC) [amila.desilva@canada.ca]
Sent: 6/12/2020 12:21:19 AM
To: Strynar, Mark [Strynar.Mark@epa.gov]
Subject: RE: SETAC PFAS FTM paper

Dear Mark

Thank you for sharing this with me. I applaud you for your integrity. This statement “being used as a tool to advance agendas” was particularly chilling. Two weeks ago when the wider organizing committee were informed, the details were very nebulous. Marc & Steve didn’t say specifically what the issue was and also would not say who was leaving the paper so I felt like we weren’t able to even have a scientific discussion about it. I want you to know that I followed up with Mark Johnson and Tamar Schlekot and said that someone should follow up with individuals to find out what happened and ensure the manuscript wasn’t going to be overly industry-biased.

As a PhD student in Scott’s group, we had many negative experiences with Bob and Steve. Certainly my impression was that there was a goal to obfuscate and manufacture doubt. The PFOA pKa debate (the basis of which is that the global distribution of PFOA including in the arctic originates from PFOA sublimation and not precursor degradation) is a fine example. I’m grateful to Scott for teaching me how to defend using scientifically compelling data and how to stay composed under fire! It isn’t easy.

I thought of this last summer when I was at a small informal meeting in Sweden with Jon Benskin, Robin Vestergren and two reps from Chemours. One of them, out of the blue, declared that he felt John Washington was a junk scientist and that his data were unreliable. It was so off-putting, unjustified and damaging.

I’m hoping more people will pursue the innovative and challenging polymer research that he initiated. And I was so happy to read the CI-PFPECA discovery in soil article over the weekend that you are a part of. It is unfortunate that you are not part of the manuscript but I appreciate and respect your decision.

Good on you, Mark.

Amila O. De Silva

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From: Strynar, Mark <Strynar.Mark@epa.gov>
Sent: June 11, 2020 10:41 AM
To: De Silva, Amila (EC) <amila.desilva@canada.ca>
Subject: Re: SETAC PFAS FTM paper

Hi Amila,

Thanks for reaching out and thanks for your kind words. I am glad to tell you what I said and where I stand on this paper however please keep to yourself. As Marc Mills is still an EPA author it will still need to be cleared by EPA. However it will not be my issue as I can't fight for something I don't truly completely believe in. See below the exact email I sent to my coauthors at the time as to why I bowed out. First email and then a second for clarification after Linda Lee asked why I had bowed out for more specifics within the group. Shortly after the first email I had a long call with Barb Henry from Gore industries and shortly after that Ian Cousins announced he was bowing out. I am unsure if he is still not part of this as I have checked out of the paper writing meetings. I should follow up to be sure all of my text has been removed. My main issues are laid out in the second email below. If organized based on order of importance to me they would be 1) the message of the fluoropolymers section, 2) being used as a tool to advance agendas 3) my parallel effort with another potentially competing paper I am writing. I consulted with my management, and Sue Fenton and Linda Birnbaum who I highly respect the opinions of before I made this decision.

Tom Webster BU called me the other day asking this same question as you. We had a long chat and I laid out for him some info that strengthens my decision. The authors of my section included members from Gore Industries <https://www.gore.com/about>, The Fluorocouncil <https://fluorocouncil.com/>, GSI Environmental <https://www.gsi-net.com/en/>, Geosyntec <https://www.geosyntec.com/>, Battelle <https://www.battelle.org/government-offerings/energy-environment/environmental-services> and of course the DOD, the EPA and academia. My main issue was with the message of the section from Barb Henry from Gore Industries. She is a wonderful lady and we had a great discussion however in essence she was pitching that fluoropolymers are not really PFAS due to large MW, resistance to degradation, low permeability and thus mobility and biological uptake and toxicity. Thus they should not be treated as PFAS in regulations. I absolutely do NOT agree with this message. She makes some very long and well laid out points, but in the end I don't buy it. I have had too many recent examples of work I am doing that are contrary to her pitch. Additionally her company has a vested monetary interest in this message taking hold. I would imagine the Fluorocouncil does as well.

I am not a conspiracy theorist, however if you have ever read "Doubt Is Their Product" by David Michaels or his follow up book "The Triumph of Doubt" this is a major tactic used by the industry to influence messaging. With the author list I could not help but take notice of this fact. GSIs website has a section on litigation support, this is not for me and you it is for industrial clients. I don't want to contribute to that effort. As much as we may caveat this work is not a consensus, if I don't fully support the entire message I don't want my name on the finished product.

Cheers,
Mark

First Email:

All,

I wanted to give you a heads up on my manuscript concerns before it comes via another route.

After reading the entire section from our group I do not see how I will be able to continue to be a co-author on this manuscript. There are sections that I will not call out that I am very opposed to the message. As each of

our names will be attached to this document, I will not be able to have my name associated with it if I don't believe 100% in the complete message. I understand this is the 11th hour, but we only got the complete document recently. Much like I would not want my section to be heavily edited by others I would not want to heavily edit others sections and and cause them to alter what they feel strongly about. That is not fair to anyone.

After a lot of thought and some counsel from my colleagues I will withdraw my section from the paper. This will have a positive effect in cutting down the length dramatically. Second I will not have to worry about prior publication. Third I will not have any concern about having my name attached to something I can't fully support.

When we clear documents at the EPA I need to be able to defend things in our papers my management and program offices may disagree with. Here there are things in this document I don't agree with so that would be very hard for me to defend certain things.

I hope you can take some time to consider what I wrote and understand. At the end of the day I feel strongly about putting my name to anything that I would not be proud to go to the mat to defend. I would have preferred to do this via a conversation but this seems to be the best way.

I invite a call or additional discussion if you want. This in no way diminishes my potential interaction with with all on this paper and any of you in future scientific and/or personal interactions. I will still shake your hand (when that is allowed again), treat you fairly and cordially in scientific and personal matters. I have no ill will for any and all on this paper. I just wont be one of the authors.

Sincerely,
Mark

Second email for clarification to my group:

All,

I had a very long discussion with Barb yesterday and talked about many things I will not bring up here. Out of respect for Barb I did not want to call out her section in my email recently. I had three very important issues that caused me to make the decision I made.

1. issue with the message being sent in the fluoropolymers section (I sent my comments to Ian/Barb for that section). We talked a lot about my personal experiences that make me question many of the statement being made in that section.
2. the issue of pre-publication of the NTA section as I am working on a parallel effort. I could shorten it and give a synopsis but I don't see that as value added.
3. Here is one you may not agree with me on. We work for agencies, industries and academic institutions that have an interest in what we say and do in the science we publish. I think we would be naive to not think that. I am also cognizant of the implications of publishing a document with opposing views and perhaps organizations with opposing agendas. Regardless of what statements are made to say this view and that view are in direct opposition, the reader may not understand. Until now I have avoided being co-author on papers that present opposing views. Additionally being a co-author on papers where I cant give my 100% support of what is said, and whom said it.

As I told Barb yesterday if she feels strongly about what she says in her section she should not compromise to find some middle ground for anyone including me. Though I value each of your opinions on this topic I am still going to remain a no on this effort. I think that is still the best for me. I know this discussion will strengthen the paper in the end. I hope you understand.

Mark

From: De Silva, Amila (EC) <amila.desilva@canada.ca>

Sent: Thursday, June 11, 2020 9:21 AM

To: Strynar, Mark <Strynar.Mark@epa.gov>

Subject: SETAC PFAS FTM paper

Hi Mark

Greetings from Canada! I've now sat on two SETAC PFAS FTM phone calls over the past two weeks that have very vaguely discussed that you are no longer part of the manuscript on the chemistry of PFAS. This is a concern to me! On the first call, it was mentioned that you were concerned about agency review and today's call it sounded more like a difference of opinion. I'm really concerned that the foremost expert in PFAS chemistry is no longer part of this paper and that more couldn't be done to resolve this. Sue Fenton also said this, btw.

I asked Steve K and Mark M directly on the conference call if they could share the sticking point and they wouldn't because they felt it wouldn't be fair to you. are you able to tell me? I pointed out that you just published in Science which has such a rigorous peer review! I think science should be the bottom line here. feel free to use my gmail

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